



News Release

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Death with Dignity update: Washington issues first annual report

OLYMPIA — Washington's first annual report on use of the Death with Dignity Act shows lethal doses of medication were dispensed to 63 people in 2009. The law allows terminally ill adults to request these prescriptions from physicians.

The state Department of Health today issued the report as required by the act, which went into effect March 5, 2009. The report covers March 5 to December 31, 2009. The 63 prescriptions were written by 53 different physicians and dispensed by 29 different pharmacists.

Of the 63 individuals who received lethal doses of prescription medication last year, 47 are known to have died. Thirty-six died after ingesting the medication. Those who died were between the ages of 48 and 95. More than 90 percent resided west of the Cascades. Most had terminal cancer and all were expected to die within six months.

According to prescribing physicians, all of the patients who received medication and died had expressed concern about loss of autonomy as a reason for requesting a prescription. Other common reasons included concerns about loss of dignity and loss of the ability to participate in activities that make life enjoyable.

Under Washington's Death with Dignity Act, the Department of Health must collect information from patients and providers who choose to participate, monitor compliance with reporting requirements, and produce an annual statistical report.

The [2009 Death with Dignity report](http://www.doh.wa.gov/dwda/) (www.doh.wa.gov/dwda/) and [information about the law](http://apps.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=70.245) (<http://apps.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=70.245>) are available online.

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